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The Fourth Century: Constantius II to Theodosios I

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The achievements of Diocletian and Constantine were real and revolutionary in many ways. Nonetheless, there was no way to know whether the reforms would survive and continue to guide the empire into the future. The task of providing continuity, of solidifying the situation and bringing these reforms to fruition, was left to Constantine's successors. These would determine, for example, whether Christianity would remain the religion of the empire or whether there would be a return to classical polytheism.

The Sons of Constantine

Oddly enough, Constantine had not made secure arrangements for the succession. To be sure, his three surviving sons had all been made caesars: Constantine II (in 316), Constantius II (in 326), and Constans (in 336). All three were the sons of Constantine and Fausta. But Constantine had also elevated his two nephews, Dalmatius and Hanibalianus, to the rank of caesar. The caesars were dispatched to various parts of the empire where they all gained experience by ruling in the name of Constantine. Hanibalianus, interestingly enough, was named king of Armenia.

After Constantine's death in 337 there was a period of remarkable indecision,

lasting four months, when it was unclear who would actually seize power and rule the empire. For one reason or another, rumors arose that Constantine's half-brothers had poisoned him, and stories of conspiracies spread throughout the empire. The troops, however, ultimately made their opinion known and took an oath that they would support no one other than the sons of Constantine. Accordingly, a massacre took place: Dalmatius and Hannibalianus were murdered, along with all the members of their families, with the exception of two young sons of Constantine's half-brother Julius Constantius, Gallus and Julian.

The sons of Constantine were thus formally acknowledged as *augusti*: Constantine II was 21, Constantius II 20, and Constans I 17. The empire was then divided: Constantine II received the western part of the empire; Constans held Italy, Africa, and Illyricum; and Constantius II was to control the East. A dispute soon broke out among the brothers. In 340 Constantine II attacked Constans, but he was defeated and killed; Constans inherited his brother's territory and controlled the entire West. While Constans was occupied in defending the Roman frontier in Britain and Germany, Constantius II had to deal with a revitalized Persia under the ambitious Shapur II (309–79). A long and difficult war in Mesopotamia was terminated by a treaty in 350. In the West Constans earned the displeasure of the troops because of his harshness, and in 350 he was overthrown and killed in an insurrection led by the officer Magnentius, who was of Germanic origin. Three claimants arose for the throne: Magnentius, Vetrario (the *magister militum*), and Nepotianus, a nephew of Constantine. Magnentius emerged from the struggle and gained control of the West. Constantius refused to recognize him, marched westward, and engaged him in a series of battles from 351 onward, which finally resulted in Magnentius' defeat and death. By 353 Constantius II was ruler of an undivided empire.

Constantius II, however, realized the difficulty of ruling the whole empire by himself and he sought a co-emperor. Turning naturally to the few remaining members of his own family, he selected Gallus – one of the two of his nephews to survive the massacre – and made him caesar. Gallus was married to Constantius' sister Constantia and sent to deal with the Persian frontier. His success against the Persians, however, as well as his temper, excited Constantius' jealousy and suspicion. The emperor recalled Gallus and had him executed in 354.

Constantius next turned to Gallus' younger half-brother Julian, who was named caesar in 355 (at age 23). Although Julian had no previous military

experience, and had spent nearly all of his time in the study of literature and philosophy, he soon became a popular and successful commander. He was able to put down a military insurrection in Gaul and to secure the stability of the frontier in Britain and along the Rhine, against the Alamanni and Franks (357–9). Constantius, however, became suspicious of Julian's success and at the beginning of 361 he ordered the bulk of the caesar's troops to leave Gaul and move to the eastern frontier. Unwilling to leave their homes in the West, the armies revolted and proclaimed Julian as emperor, supposedly against his will. Julian sought Constantius' approval for his new status as *augustus*, but the elder emperor refused. In 361 the two armies marched toward each other for a battle to decide the issue, but Constantius suddenly and unexpectedly became ill and died. He had no sons, and Julian became emperor of the whole empire.

Figure 4.1 Head of a colossal bronze sculpture of a fourth-century emperor, probably Constantius II (but possibly Constantine I). Representations of the sons of Constantine resemble closely those of their father. Notice the strong, calm visage and the large, upturned eyes with deeply cut pupils (compare fig. 3.1). Capitoline Museum, Rome. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.



Meanwhile, the Arian controversy continued to cause difficulties in the years after Constantine's death. In the West, the decisions of the Council of Nicaea were more or less accepted, but in the East opinion was divided. Athanasios, bishop of Alexandria, maintained a hard-line policy that people must accept the teaching of Nicaea that the Son was *homoousios* (of the same substance) with the Father (so the supporters of the council are called *homoousians*). The emperors Constantine II and Constans I generally supported Nicaea, while Constantius II supported Arianism. There were, however, many shades of Arianism: "Semi- Arians" emerged in part as a result of attempts to find a compromise on this difficult question. Constantius was a moderate Arian, but Bishop Makedonios of Constantinople was more militant and was quite willing to persecute the Nicaeans, something to which the emperor occasionally agreed and for which he was unfavorably remembered by the Orthodox tradition. Generally speaking, Constantius II sought to find some formula for compromise and summoned several councils for that purpose, but they all failed. Not surprisingly, the bishops were at the center of the controversy and many of them

took stands that did not allow for compromise. The most famous case in this regard was Athanasios of Alexandria, and Constantius had him exiled and reinstated several times.

Constantius II and his brothers, unlike their father, were raised as Christians and they accepted without question their responsibility, before God, to defend the church and, more specifically, to maintain the unity of the faith through the elimination of heresy. Despite the controversy over Arianism, there was

Box 4.1 Constantius II Visits Rome (357)

In 357 the emperor Constantius II came to Rome for the first time. Although he had been emperor then for 20 years, he had never visited the city, an indication of the way that Rome was no longer the center of empire. Constantius' entry into the city, however, as described by Ammianus Marcellinus, provides a good example of what was expected of an emperor at that time: he was no longer a mere mortal, but a figure who played a highly ceremonial role, not only in politics and in court, but also on the streets of the cities of the empire. He was, to a certain degree, like a statue, and he presented the idea of empire in visible form to his subjects. As such a figure, he was larger than life and, even though Ammianus says that Constantius was rather short, he nonetheless ducked his head when passing under arches and gates, to give the impression that he was of such godlike dimensions:

Accordingly, being saluted as *augustus* with favouring shouts, while hills and shores thundered out the roar, he never stirred, but showed himself as calm and imperturbable as he was commonly seen in the provinces. For he both stooped when passing through lofty gates (although he was very short), and as if his neck were in a vise, he kept the gaze of his eyes straight ahead and turned his face neither to right nor to left, but, just as though he were an ordinary person, neither did he nod when the wheel jolted nor was he ever seen to spit, or to wipe or rub his face or nose, or move his hands about. (Ammianus Marcellinus 16.10.9–10, trans. (slightly modified) John C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1935), vol. 1, p. 247)

relative political stability during the quarter-century after the death of Constantine, and this was certainly important in the triumph of Christianity in the empire.

Constantius II was influential in the development of Constantinople; he raised the prestige of the Senate there and granted eastern senators a rank equal to those of Rome. Constantius also constructed the first church of Hagia Sophia (Agia Sophia, Aya Sofia) in Constantinople, the church that was to become almost synonymous with the empire itself. Later literary sources glorify Constantine as the founder of the Byzantine “system,” dominated by the emperor and the patriarch of Constantinople (as the bishop of Constantinople came to be called), but it is clear that much of the responsibility should be accorded to Constantius II, whose long reign regularized the new arrangement and made it the norm.

Julian the Apostate (361–363)

Julian “the Apostate” will always remain a mysterious and controversial figure, admired by some but feared and detested by others. His reign was a serious threat to the Constantinian system and to the dominance of Christianity, and one will never know what might have happened had his reign not been cut short suddenly.

Julian, like the other members of his family, had been raised as a Christian, and he had even taken lower clerical orders (as a “lector” – or “reader” – in the church). He had studied under Bishop George of Kappadokia, but he was particularly attracted to Hellenic (i.e., classical, pagan) learning, literature, and philosophy. He studied rhetoric at Pergamum and philosophy in the famous schools of Athens. It is impossible to know exactly when Julian decided to make a break with Christianity and put his pagan leanings into practice, but shortly after the death of Constantius II he officially cancelled the laws issued against pagan practices. The bases of Julian’s political policy were his philosophical and personal attraction to classical Hellenism and his hostility toward the policies of Constantine and his family. The latter probably arose as a reaction to the terrible massacre of his family in 337, but the former seems to have been a genuine personal preference, deeply seated in Julian’s own experience and his education in the world of classical antiquity. Julian’s paganism was a curious blend of intellectual preference for classical literature and a crude superstition, based apparently on the influence of some of the “sophists” who surrounded him. Some of these were genuine intellectuals, but others were theurgists, “holy men” loosely connected with Neoplatonism, who, at their best, for example Iamblichos and Proklos, sought union with God through religious ritual or prayer. At their worst, however, the theurgists were charlatans who used magic, fraud, and sleight of hand to fool the gullible. The theurgist Maximos, whom Julian apparently met at Pergamum, was one of the most notorious of these, and he had considerable influence on the young prince. Julian was initiated into the sacred mysteries at Ephesos and later at Eleusis (near Athens), and he invited Maximos to join him at court.

Julian did not openly persecute the Christians, but rather offered toleration to all, including heretics and Jews. He encouraged the latter to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem (inviting all kinds of apocalyptic expectations of the end of the world), knowing that this would confound the Christians, who generally believed that the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 had fulfilled a prophecy of Christ

and had demonstrated that God had abandoned the Jews. He also knew that toleration of heretics would quickly lead to infighting and even bloodshed among the Christians, and he was correct in this expectation. He believed in the superiority of polytheism and thought that if people were given a free choice, they would quickly abandon Christianity and revert to polytheism, and, of course, many did. But Julian also sought to reshape and reinvigorate polytheism, unifying and organizing it, and encouraging the priesthood to set a good example of charity and proper behavior. His religion was essentially monotheistic and philosophical, although, again, his ideas were also influenced by magic, emotionalism, and superstition. The one serious criticism of his

Box 4.2 Heretics in Early Byzantium

Heresy became one of the most important issues as Christianity came more and more to dominate life in all its aspects. One crucial feature of Christianity is that, like Judaism and Islam, it is not only monotheist in belief but also exclusivist in orientation. This means that Christianity could not accept the proposition that two differing interpretations of religious truth could both be acceptable: one was (presumably) right and the other wrong. This led to the need to define religious truth and, at the same time, to the concept of heresy – incorrect belief as determined by the contemporary church. With the involvement of the Byzantine state in the enforcement of orthodoxy, heresies and heretics were subject to what we would call official discrimination and severe judicial penalties.

One of the most interesting statements of such penalties can be found in a law issued by Theodosios II in 428, presumably under the influence of the fire-breathing patriarch Nestorios, who was himself to be condemned for heresy a mere three years later:

CTh 16.5.65 (3 May 428). Emperors Theodosius and Valentinian Augustuses to Florentius, Praetorian Prefect.

The madness of the heretics must be so suppressed that they shall know beyond doubt, before all else, that the churches which they have taken from the orthodox, wherever they are held, shall immediately be surrendered to the Catholic Church ...

1. Next, if they should join to themselves other clerics or priests...a fine of ten pounds of gold for each person shall be paid into Our treasury, both by him who created such cleric and by him who allowed himself to be so created, or if they should pretend poverty, such fine shall be exacted from the common body of clerics of the aforesaid superstition or even from their offertories.

2. Furthermore, since not all should be punished with the same severity, the Arians, indeed, the Macedonians, and the Apollinarians, whose crime it is to be deceived by harmful meditation and to believe lies about the Fountain of Truth, shall not be permitted to have a church within any municipality. Moreover, the Novatians and Sabbatians shall be deprived of the privilege of any innovation [i.e., they cannot build new churches], if perchance they should so attempt. The Eunomians, indeed, the Valentinians, the Montanists or Priscillianists, the Phrygians, the Marcianists, the Borborians, the Messalians, the Euchites or Enthusiasts, the Donatists, the Audians, the Hydroparastatae, the Tascodrogitae, the Photinians, the Paulians, the Marcellians, and those who have arrived at the lowest depth of wickedness, namely, the Manichaeans, shall nowhere on Roman soil have the right to assemble and pray. The Manichaeans, moreover, shall be expelled from the municipalities, since no opportunity must be left to any of them whereby an injury may be

wrought upon the elements themselves.

3. No employment at all in the imperial service shall be permitted them except on gubernatorial staffs in the provinces and as soldiers in the camp. They shall be conceded no right at all to make reciprocal gifts, no right to make a testament or last will. All the laws which were formerly issued and promulgated at various times against such persons and against all others who oppose our faith, shall remain in force forever...

5. We decree that all the foregoing provisions shall be so enforced that no judge may order a minor punishment or no punishment at all for such a crime when it is reported to him, unless he himself is willing to suffer the same penalty which through connivance he has remitted for others. (*The Theodosian Code*, trans. Clyde Pharr (Princeton, 1952), pp. 462–3)

This text makes clear the harshness with which the emperors sought to deal with heresy. Nonetheless, the law shows that heresies were graded in terms of increasing severity and that some of these were essentially tolerated, attempts being made to limit them through the prohibition of the consecration of new clergy and the construction of new churches – apparently the state was willing to allow these believers to conduct their worship in relative peace. The more “serious” heretics – including the Manichaeans who should not be considered Christians at all – were forbidden to assemble anywhere in the empire, and their legal rights (mainly to transmit property) were severely restricted. Nonetheless, there is nothing in the law that curtailed thought or sought to carry out an “inquisition” to ferret out heretics. This is certainly not to deny that there was persecution of heretics – clearly there was – but the state was wary of this and generally sought to encourage orthodoxy through other means.

policies, made by pagans and Christians alike, was that he forbade Christians to teach in the schools – saying they could retire and teach the Gospels! Many of these Christian teachers turned their talents to other tasks, including Apollinarios and his like-named son, who set about turning the Gospels into proper classical verse.

Julian also had political views that he thought harked back to the “great” days of the earlier Roman Empire. Thus, he wished to avoid the trappings of imperial power that had been used since the reign of Diocletian, and he even wished to see himself, as the emperor *augustus* had done, as a “first citizen” rather than as a despot. Instead of imperial regalia, Julian wore simple clothes and a beard, showing himself to be a philosopher as much as an emperor. He realized that the cities of the empire had been the core of the Roman political structure and he wished to see them revived, along with the local urban aristocracy, the *curiales*. He restored to the cities the properties that Constantine had confiscated and encouraged the local aristocrats to resume their places as the leaders of society.

Julian quickly turned his attention to military affairs, and in 363 he prepared a great campaign against Persia. While he was outfitting the expedition he attempted to win the inhabitants of Antioch over to his brand of polytheism. The Antiochenes, however, refused to listen, and only laughed at the emperor and

called him names. Julian's military campaign was at first a brilliant success. The Roman army pushed on to the interior of Persia and even attacked the Persian capital of Ctesiphon. While rallying his troops, however, Julian was mysteriously struck by a spear and soon thereafter died (June 26, 363), thus cutting short the military campaign and putting a sudden stop to his broader program. Julian's successor, Jovian, was a Christian, and his religious policy returned to the direction earlier set by Constantine and his sons. We will never know what would have happened had Julian enjoyed a longer reign.

Historians, both ancient and modern, have held widely divergent views of the last polytheistic emperor. Ammianus Marcellinus was a pagan and a contemporary of Julian. Like many of the educated elite, he saw Julian as a heroic figure and the last hope for a return to the policies of the old Roman state. Nevertheless, even Ammianus realized that Julian's character was not free of fault:

He [Julian] was a man truly to be numbered with the heroic spirits, distinguished for his illustrious deeds and his inborn majesty. For since there are, in the opinion of the philosophers, four principal virtues, moderation, wisdom, justice, and courage and corresponding to these also some external characteristics, such as knowledge of the art of war, authority, good fortune, and liberality, these as a whole and separately Julian cultivated with constant zeal.

In the first place, he was so conspicuous for inviolate chastity that after the loss of his wife it is well known that he never gave a thought to love: bearing in mind what we read in Plato, that Sophocles, the tragic poet, when he was asked, at a great age, whether he still had congress with women, said no, adding that he was glad that he had escaped from this passion as from some mad and cruel master...

Then there were very many proofs of his wisdom, of which it will suffice to mention a few. He was thoroughly skilled in the arts of war and peace, greatly inclined to courtesy, and claiming for himself only so much deference as he thought preserved him from contempt and insolence. He was older in virtue than in years. He gave great attention to the administration of justice, and was sometimes an unbending judge; also a very strict censor in regulating conduct, with a calm contempt for riches, scorning everything mortal; in short, he often used to declare that it was shameful for a wise man, since he possessed a soul, to seek honors from bodily gifts...His authority was so well

established that, being feared as well as deeply loved as one who shared in the dangers and hardships of his men, he both in the heat of fierce battles condemned cowards to punishment, and, while he was still only a caesar, he controlled his men even without pay, when they were fighting with savage tribes, as I have long ago said. And when they were armed and mutinous, he did not fear to address them and threaten to return to private life, if they continued to be insubordinate. Finally, one thing it will be enough to know in token of many, namely, that merely by a speech he induced his Gallic troops, accustomed to snow and to the Rhine, to traverse long stretches of country and follow him through torrid Assyria to the very frontiers of the Medes. His success was so conspicuous that for a long time he seemed to ride on the shoulders of Fortune herself, his faithful guide as he in victorious career surmounted enormous difficulties. And after he left the western region, so long as he was on earth all nations preserved perfect quiet, as if a kind of earthly wand of Mercury were pacifying them.

There are many undoubted tokens of his generosity. Among these are his very light imposition of tribute, his remission of the crown-money, the cancellation of many debts made great by long standing, the impartial treatment of disputes between the privy purse and private persons, the restoration of the revenues from taxes to various states along with their lands...furthermore, that he was never eager to increase his wealth, which he thought was better secured in the hands of its possessors; and he often remarked that Alexander the Great, when asked where his treasures were, gave the kindly answer, "in the hands of my friends."

Having set down his good qualities, so many as I could know, let me now come to an account of his faults, although they can be summed up briefly. In disposition he was somewhat inconsistent, but he controlled this by the excellent habit of submitting, when he went wrong, to correction. He was somewhat talkative, and very seldom silent; also too much given to the consideration of omens and portents, so that in this respect he seemed to equal the emperor Hadrian. Superstitious rather than truly religious, he sacrificed innumerable victims without regard to cost, so that one might believe that if he had returned from the Parthians, there would soon have been a scarcity of cattle...

He delighted in the applause of the mob, and desired beyond measure praise for the slightest matters, and the desire for popularity often led him to

converse with unworthy men...

The laws which he enacted were not oppressive, but stated exactly what was to be done or left undone, with a few exceptions. For example, it was a harsh law that forbade Christian rhetoricians and grammarians to teach, unless they consented to worship the pagan deities. And also it was almost unbearable that in the municipal towns he unjustly allowed persons to be made members of the councils, who, either as foreigners, or because of personal privileges or birth, were wholly exempt from such assemblies.

The figure and proportion of his body were as follows. He was of medium stature. His hair lay smooth as if it had been combed, his beard was shaggy and trimmed so as to end in a point, his eyes were fine and full of fire, an indication of the acuteness of his mind. His eyebrows were handsome, his nose very straight, his mouth somewhat large with a pendulous lower lip. His neck was thick and somewhat bent, his shoulders large and broad. Moreover, right from top to toe he was a man of straight well-proportioned bodily frame and as a result was strong and a good runner. (Ammianus Marcellinus 25.4.1–25)

Edward Gibbon, in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (chapter 22), has an idealistic view of Julian based on the rational ideas of the Enlightenment:

The reformation of the Imperial court was one of the first and most necessary acts of the government of Julian. Soon after his entrance into the palace of Constantinople he had occasion for the service of a barber. An officer, magnificently dressed, immediately presented himself. “It is a barber,” exclaimed the prince, with affected surprise, “that I want, and not a receiver-general of the finances.” He questioned the man concerning the profits of his employment, and was informed that, besides a large salary and some valuable perquisites, he enjoyed a daily allowance for twenty servants and as many horses. A thousand barbers, a thousand cupbearers, a thousand cooks, were distributed in the several offices of luxury; and the number of eunuchs could be compared only with the insects of a summer’s day. The monarch who resigned to his subjects the superiority of merit and virtue was distinguished by the oppressive magnificence of his dress, his table, his buildings, and his train. The stately palaces erected by Constantine and his sons were decorated with many-coloured marbles and ornaments of massy gold. The most exquisite dainties were procured to gratify their pride rather than their taste; birds of the most distant climates, fish from the most remote seas, fruits out of

their natural season, winter roses, and summer snows. The domestic crowd of the palace surpassed the expense of the legions; yet the smallest part of this costly multitude was subservient to the use, or even to the splendour, of the throne. The monarch was disgraced, and the people was injured, by the creation and sale of an infinite number of obscure and even titular employments; and the most worthless of mankind might purchase the privilege of being maintained, without the necessity of labour, from the public revenue. The waste of an enormous household, the increase of fees and perquisites, which were soon claimed as a lawful debt, and the bribes which they extorted from those who feared their enmity or solicited their favour, suddenly enriched these haughty menials. They abused their fortune, without considering their past or their future condition; and their rapine and venality could be equalled only by the extravagance of their dissipations. Their silken robes were embroidered with gold, their tables were served with delicacy and profusion; the houses which they built for their own use would have covered the farm of an ancient consul; and the most honourable citizens were obliged to dismount from their horses and respectfully to salute a eunuch whom they met on the public highway. The luxury of the palace excited the contempt and indignation of Julian, who usually slept on the ground, who yielded with reluctance to the indispensable calls of nature, and who placed his vanity not in emulating, but in despising the pomp of royalty.

Julian was not insensible of the advantages of freedom. From his studies he had imbibed the spirit of ancient sages and heroes; his life and fortunes had depended on the caprice of a tyrant; and, when he ascended the throne, his pride was sometimes mortified by the reflection that the slaves who would not dare to censure his defects were not worthy to applaud his virtues. He sincerely abhorred the system of oriental despotism which Diocletian, Constantine, and the patient habits of four score years, had established in the empire. A motive of superstition prevented the execution of the design which Julian had frequently meditated, of relieving his head from the weight of a costly diadem; but he absolutely refused the title of *Dominus* or *Lord*, a word which was grown so familiar to the ears of the Romans, that they no longer remembered its servile and humiliating origin.

With the death of Julian the House of Constantine came to an end. The rulers who followed were military men: like Diocletian and Constantine, most of them were from the Balkans, and they were not especially sophisticated. The religious controversies (especially Arianism) continued, and pressures grew from the

barbarians on the northern frontier. Nonetheless, the late fourth-century emperors determined the way in which the legacy of Constantine would be shaped and passed on to future generations.

Jovian (363–364)

Julian's sudden death left a void of power in the Roman world. Virtually all the members of Constantine's family were now dead, and Julian had stubbornly refused to name a successor. Shortly after his death the senior military commanders met to select the next emperor (remember that the army was on campaign deep in Persian territory at the time). Their first choice was Salutius Secundus, praetorian prefect of the East and a moderate pagan. He was, however, quite old and he refused the position. The commanders' second choice was the Christian Jovian, an officer in the palace guard (*domestici et protectores*); he accepted the position, with some misgiving. Almost immediately after his accession Jovian agreed to a peace with Shapur, the Persian king, allowing him the freedom to return to Constantinople to secure his throne. The treaty was "disgraceful" since it gave up, not only all that Julian had just won, but virtually all Roman conquests since the time of Septimius Severus. This involved the surrender of Nisibis, the most important Roman military stronghold in the East, and all the territory beyond the Tigris. Jovian abandoned the Roman protectorate in Armenia and agreed to pay the Persians a large subsidy in gold.

Valentinian I (364–375) and Valens (364–378)

Jovian rescinded Julian's generally unpopular legislation against the Christians and he openly favored the Christian church once more. He did not, however, persecute the pagans, but allowed all to worship as they pleased. Jovian died suddenly, on February 17, 364, having reigned for only eight months.

The military commanders met again at Nicaea and chose a hardened and successful commander of Pannonian descent, Flavius Valentinianus, known in English as Valentinian I. From one point of view, this relatively orderly succession was an indication of the stability of the contemporary political structure. Valentinian, 43 at the time, was crude and poorly educated, but he was an energetic campaigner and as emperor he was nearly constantly on campaign.

Within six months of his accession the army besought Valentinian to choose a colleague to help him rule the empire, and he selected his younger brother Valens, who was then 36 years old. Valentinian ruled in the West, from his imperial residence, first in Milan and then in Trier, while Valens ruled the East, from his residence in Antioch.

Valentinian concentrated his attention on the Rhine frontier, where he defeated and pacified the Franks and Alamanni; he also defeated the Picts and Scots in Britain, along with Frankish and Saxon pirates. He also undertook campaigns against the Moors in North Africa. Valens, meanwhile, fought the Goths in Thrace, and in 371 he turned his attention to the Persian frontier, where he was able to re-establish Roman influence in Armenia. In 365 a distant relative of Julian, Prokopios, rose in rebellion and gained the support of a Gothic leader, Athanaric; Valens put the revolt down with special severity.

In 375 Valentinian moved to Illyricum, where he sought to deal with incursions of the Quadi and Sarmatians. Valentinian was undone by his violent temper when, in 375, he met an embassy of Quadi who were seeking terms for a peace treaty. Valentinian found the terms suggested by Quadi to be so infuriating that he lost his temper and apparently suffered a stroke, from which he died (November 17, 375). Valentinian had two sons, Gratian (then 16) and Valentinian II (4 years old), and he had already crowned them *augusti*, so there was no real question that they would succeed their father, but the situation was difficult because of their youth.

Both Valentinian and Valens favored soldiers, especially Pannonians, in their administration, rather than aristocrats and *literati*. They vastly increased the size of the senatorial order, including within this group many individuals of peasant – or even barbarian – origin because of their military ability. During this period the problems of the cities became critical and the role of the *curiales* especially difficult. Julian, it will be remembered, had tried to preserve the *curiae* (city councils) and had restored the property that had been confiscated by Constantine and Constantius II. Valens and Valentinian reconfiscated this property but promised to allow the cities a proportion of the revenue (a kind of revenue-sharing scheme) for the repair of public buildings and other expenses. The state took measures to try to keep the *curiales* in the cities, where they could undertake their civic duties and insure that the imperial taxes were paid. In the context of the pressures put on them, many *curiales* apparently sought to flee their responsibilities through a variety of means. As a result, the state ruled that *curiales* could not become senators (and thus earn immunity from civic duties)

unless they left a son behind who could take over these duties. In addition, *curiales* were forbidden from becoming clerics (Christian priests, etc., who were also exempt from civic duties) unless they surrendered some of their property to the local *curia*. Valentinian and Valens made liberal use of the institution of the *defensor civitatis*. This was an individual, sent out from the central government, who was to supervise civic expenses and act as a kind of public civic patron and protector of the poor – he was to make sure that local needs were being met and that the wealthy were living up to their responsibilities. In some ways this was an intervention of the central government in local affairs, but it is hard to see how the government could have done anything else. Valentinian and Valens were careful administrators, and they seem to have been able to cut state expenditures (and thus taxes), perhaps by as much as one-half.

Valentinian and Valens were convinced Christians. As mentioned, they again confiscated the temple lands that Julian had restored to the pagan cults, but paganism was officially tolerated: only divination and magic were condemned and forbidden (as in fact they had always been, even by most pagan emperors). Public sacrifice was discouraged, but many rites were allowed if their practitioners could show that they were of ancient origin.

Valentinian was apparently not interested in the continuing dispute over Arianism, and he refused to take sides. He was personally a moderate Nicene, and he said that the bishops could meet to discuss religious issues on their own, since this was their business and did not really concern the state. Valens, on the other hand, was a moderate Arian. He viewed Nicene (orthodox) opposition to Arianism as insubordination, and ultimately resorted to persecution against the orthodox, encouraged in this by the intolerance of the Arian hierarchy and the eagerness for martyrdom on the part of the orthodox.

The Barbarian World

One of the most important phenomena in late antiquity was the relationship between the Roman Empire and the barbarian peoples, especially those who originally lived north of the empire, across the Rhine and the Danube frontiers. In the simplest terms, these people ultimately conquered the western half of the empire and transformed its culture, language, and institutions. At one time these people – mostly Germanic in language – were thought to be wild, uncivilized, nomadic – true barbarians who descended on the empire and laid it low. Today we know that the situation was much more complex. The barbarians exhibited

vast differences from group to group and were far more affected by Roman culture than we had previously thought. Furthermore, most of the Germanic peoples were settled agriculturalists rather than mobile soldiers.

The Germanic peoples were not the only barbarians known to the Romans. Indeed, to a certain degree, the barbarians par excellence were the Persians, ruled in this period by the dynasty of the Sassanids. The Persians were barbarians in the archetypal sense that they were non-Greeks and non-Romans: the Romans of course always identified their culture with that of Greece, and since for the Greeks the Persians were always the “enemy,” the self-defining other, so too were they for the Romans. Thus, first the Parthians and then the Sassanids were always the powerful enemy on the eastern frontier. But the Sassanids clearly were civilized and highly cultured, a match for the Romans on virtually every level, from culture to military power. They had an organized, monarchic state, a monotheistic state religion (Zoroastrianism), and a ruler who was supported by all the apparatus of religion and state. The Persians were also a serious military threat to the Romans since they had a powerful army, whose primary force was made up of heavy cavalry. Their generals were skilled and they knew all the arts of war, from how to fight pitched battles to how to besiege cities.

The Romans thus had ambivalent feelings toward the Persians. On the one hand they admired and respected them, but on the other they looked down on them as inferior (since they were not Romans) and effete. Certainly the Sassanids posed a threat to the Romans that was unlike that posed by any other enemy.

In the East there were certain other non-Roman people, most of them living outside the empire or engaged in a tenuous relationship with Rome. Thus, some of these people were technically “allies” of the Romans, who were formally connected to the empire by a treaty (*foedus*). Among these were various Arabic principalities and tribes (in Arabia and Syria) and various folk living in the region of the Caucasus, especially between the Black and the Caspian Seas, north of Mesopotamia. Among these were the Lazi and the Iberians. The Armenians had a special place, since their state had been established at an early date, and, indeed, the Armenians claimed that theirs was the first country to accept Christianity. Armenia lay at the northern end of the border between Rome and Persia, and it had long played the role of a buffer state, first dominated by Rome and then by Persia, in succession; whichever of the great powers was stronger tended to dominate Armenia.

In Africa there were many native peoples, who enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy and who could, on occasion, threaten the state. These included the Blemmyes, who lived south of Egypt, in northern Nubia, and apparently maintained their ancient religion against the triumph of Christianity in Egypt. To the west the Moors or Berbers presumably were the autochthonous inhabitants of North Africa, who had been pushed to the mountain fringes by the succession of Punic and Roman domination, but it seems likely that they began to move down into the fertile coastal plain in late antiquity. It is often argued that Donatism was especially welcome among the Berber population of northern Africa.

Christian Culture in the Fourth Century

As the fourth century wore on Christian intellectuals came more and more to dominate the cultural life of the empire. It is remarkable that, prior to the time of Constantine, Christian scholars (such as Origen) had been relegated to the background of intellectual discussion. By the middle of the fourth century, however, less than half a century after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, Christians had come increasingly to dominate the intellectual currents of the time. It was this, at least as much as anything else, that the emperor Julian had struggled to fight.

The Christians, for their part, had long ago come to accept the premise that Christianity and classical culture were not irrevocably opposed, and Christian thinkers (from the Apostle Paul onward) made use of Greek modes of thinking and the principles of Greek logic and philosophy. In the fourth century, however, this tradition became dominant and was represented by thinkers as diverse as Eusebios of Caesarea, St. Athanasios of Alexandria, the Cappadocian Fathers (Sts. Basil, Gregory of Nazianzos, Gregory of Nyssa), St. Jerome, and St. Ambrose of Milan. Eusebios seems to have been the first to connect fully the salvation promised by Christianity and the political tradition of the Roman state, something that was to characterize Byzantine tradition for the next thousand years and beyond. His views of history, the role of the bishop, and the place of the emperor in Byzantine society quickly became the norm. St. Athanasios has already been mentioned as the foremost defender of the orthodox position against the Arians, and his fiery and obstinate opposition to Constantius II and Julian was nearly as important as his carefully argued theological treatises. Likewise, his biography of St. Anthony, the archetypal hermit-monk, set the standard for hagiographical works (lives of the saints).

The Cappadocian Fathers are perhaps most characteristic of these Christian intellectuals. Basil was an important bishop and monastic organizer (see below), his brother Gregory of Nyssa was a subtle philosopher, and Gregory of Nazianzos, who became bishop of Constantinople, was an accomplished orator. Although subtle differences can be discerned among their opinions, on the whole they agreed in their opposition to Arianism and their eagerness to adapt the classical tradition of learning to Christian use. Basil and Gregory of Nazianzos were students together in Athens (along with Julian, the future emperor), while Gregory of Nyssa was a younger brother of Basil. Although they were all strictly orthodox in their theology, they had a profound admiration for Plato and even made considerable use of the heretic Origen. Their theological work had an important influence in the development of ideas that were to be the underpinning of discussion of the Christological debates that took place in the fifth century. At the same time, all three of the Cappadocian Fathers were members of the curial class and they all became bishops who were deeply involved in the social as well as spiritual issues of the time.

The Germanic Peoples

Naturally, we are poorly informed about the prehistory of the Germanic peoples. Literary sources are restricted to views preserved for us by Roman authors, who were obviously biased or who at least had their own point of view. The most famous of these accounts is the *Germania* of Tacitus, written in the early part of the second century AD. This well-known account presents the Germans as ferocious fighters who nonetheless preserved noble traits of honor and fairness and a kind of primitive democracy. Although there may be some reliable information in the *Germania*, it is clear that the work is primarily a moralizing treatise, designed more to shame the Romans into good behavior than to present an accurate view of Germanic society.

The archaeological record for the early Germanic peoples is obviously tantalizing and it is providing us with much valuable information as research continues. One of the problems with the archaeological record is the difficulty in distinguishing one group from another on the basis of archaeological evidence, and we cannot always relate the archaeological evidence to the ethnic groups we know from the written sources. Linguistic evidence, on the other hand, has been a particularly fruitful source of information since we can trace placenames, personal names, and linguistic variants back to a very distant past. Indeed, our

understanding of much of the prehistoric period of Germanic society has been based on this linguistic evidence. Unfortunately, some of this material has been used in the twentieth century for political reasons, either to glorify one group vis-à-vis another or to argue that one modern nation has a right to live in a certain territory as a result of this historical information.

With a few exceptions, the Germanic peoples who took part in the great *Völkerwanderung* (migrations) were not the same as the German tribes known to Caesar, Tiberius, and the other generals of the early Roman Empire. These latter peoples, living mainly between the Rhine and the Elbe, are known as the West Germans, and during the early imperial period they became increasingly Romanized, so that by the fourth century many of them were scarcely distinguishable from the Romans. Many of them lived inside Roman territory, and the *limes*, the Roman term usually translated as “border,” was less a border than it was a broad frontier band, permitting interchange and commerce as much as it prevented invasion. To be sure, some of these West Germanic peoples remained outside the *limes* and continued to give the Romans trouble. Among these were the Franks, the Alamanni, and the Saxons. The Alamanni, in particular, had invaded the empire in the third century: in the 250s they had crossed the frontier and raided Italy until they were driven out by Gallienus.

The Germanic peoples who caused the most difficulty for the Romans, however, were those we call the East Germans, including people such as the Goths (Visigoths and Ostrogoths) and the Vandals. They had apparently lived in Scandinavia since time immemorial, but perhaps in the second century AD they began to move in a broad arc, swinging across eastern Europe and coming to rest at the formidable barrier of the Danube. By the 350s, if not earlier, various federations had come to establish themselves in this area just outside the empire. They did not immediately threaten the empire, but instead most of the groups settled down in the relatively open land across the Danube and founded farming villages where they lived fairly peacefully. What set events in motion, however, was the arrival of the Huns on the Danube frontier. The Huns were a Turkic people from Central Asia; they were nomadic mounted hunters and warriors, very different from the settled Germans. The Huns’ homeland was far away from the Roman frontier, but there was no effective natural barrier between Central Asia and Roman territory, and, once the Huns set off toward the West (perhaps after having been defeated by the Chinese), there was very little to stop them.

The Battle of Adrianople (August 8, 378)

In 375 Valentinian I died, leaving the western part of the empire to his sons Gratian and Valentinian II (who was only a young boy). Valens was occupied on the eastern frontier from about 371 onward. In about 376 the Huns suddenly appeared north of the Danube (in what is now Romania), and the terrified Goths sought safety across the Roman frontier. They offered to settle in Roman territory and serve in the Roman army; Valens thought they would make a good addition to the army and he agreed. Perhaps as many as 200,000 Goths sought to settle within the empire, but the Roman government was not able to meet the vast needs of this immigrant population. Food was promised to them, but it did not arrive or was sold to the Germans by corrupt officials at exorbitant prices. These same officials also seized many Goths and sold them into slavery. Frustrated by this treatment, the Goths rose in revolt in 377 and began to ravage Roman territory in Thrace.

Valens immediately moved his army from the eastern frontier and brought it to deal with the situation in Thrace. Gratian also began to move his forces from the West to meet the threat. Valens, however, was apparently jealous of his young nephew and he received a false report that the Gothic troops were only 10,000 strong. Accordingly, as soon as he arrived in Thrace Valens immediately prepared for battle, hoping to win the victory for himself. Valens' troops, however, were tired from their long march, and they were not able to set themselves up properly for the battle, which took place on a hot plain outside the city of Adrianople (Adrianopolis) in Thrace (Map 9.1).

The Goths drew up the wagons containing their families into a large circle, with cavalry detachments on both sides facing Valens' forces. The Roman skirmishers were driven back in panic by the Gothic soldiers and they ran quickly into the ranks of their own men. Meanwhile, the cavalry on the Roman left wing advanced too far against the enemy, and the Gothic cavalry, which had been held in reserve, was able to strike the left side of the Roman infantry, which had no effective protection. Attacked from the side and the front, the Roman troops were slaughtered at will. Valens and about two-thirds of his army perished at the hands of the victorious Goths.

The situation was catastrophic for the empire: a Roman emperor was killed in battle for the first time in well over a century, there was a power vacuum in the East, the Persian frontier was undefended, and the Goths were at large in Thrace. The Battle of Adrianople also showed that the Germans could defeat a trained

Roman army, and it demonstrated the superiority of heavy mounted cavalry. In the crisis the Roman government was temporarily paralyzed, and it was fortunate that the Goths were unable to take advantage of the situation. They had no experience in besieging cities and had to be content with raiding the Thracian countryside.

Theodosios the Great (379–395) and Gratian (375–383)

After the Battle of Adrianople Gratian was left as sole emperor. It was clear that he needed a colleague, since he was young, inexperienced, and completely unable to deal with the military situation. In this context, the state turned to Theodosios, an experienced general. Theodosios' father (also called Theodosios) was from an old Spanish family, and he had been one of Valentinian's primary commanders; he restored order in Britain and put down the rebellion of Firmus in North Africa. The elder Theodosios had, however, fallen from favor under circumstances that are not clear, and he was executed in 375. His son, the younger Theodosios, retired to his Spanish estate, but in the circumstances after Adrianople Gratian had him recalled and proclaimed emperor at Sirmium on January 19, 379. Theodosios was given control of all the East, along with Dacia and Macedonia.

Theodosios had many immediate problems to face, not least of which was the need to recruit new soldiers to fill the ranks depleted by the disaster of Adrianople – he had to replace at least 20,000 troops. Theodosios instituted stringent measures to locate and enroll those who had an obligation to serve in the army. He sought out the sons of veterans (who were supposed also to serve) and enlisted even those who had mutilated themselves in order to escape service.

Meanwhile Theodosios tried to control the Goths who were still ravaging Thrace. He was unable to pin them down to fight a decisive battle, and they continued to raid the farms and villages of the countryside. Theodosios finally signed a treaty with the Goths on October 3, 382. Under the terms of this treaty the Goths were allowed to settle in Roman territory but in return they were to serve in the Roman army as *foederati* (barbarian allies), apparently contributing about 20,000 men. It had always been Roman policy to ally with foreigners (including barbarians) who might fight for and alongside the Romans. But until this point the foreigners were either treated as allied contingents or were enrolled

one by one in small numbers in Roman units. Now, however, the Goths were enrolled in large numbers and were allowed to serve under their own tribal leaders. This was an important break with precedent, a policy that was condemned by some contemporaries (see the speeches of Themistios, who was very much opposed to this “barbarization” of the army). Thus, large numbers of Goths were settled along the south bank of the Danube and in northern Thrace.

In the East Theodosios was able to arrange a peace with Persia. Armenia was partitioned between Rome and Persia, the Romans receiving the smaller share. Nonetheless, as a result of this Theodosios was able to control a strategic territory between the upper Tigris and Euphrates, which would be of considerable significance in case of renewed hostilities between the major powers.

Figure 4.2 Missorium of Theodosios I. This large silver disc shows the senior emperor, set in an elaborate architectural frame, with his two sons and heirs to the throne sitting at a lower level than the senior emperor. Note the soldiers with their shields and the halo of Theodosius. The halo, of course, is not a mark of sanctity, but a symbol of divine support for the rulers. Academia de la Historia, Madrid, Spain. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.



In religious policy Theodosios was a rather straightforward Nicene Christian,

and his Christianity had a definite western orientation (as one might imagine from his place of origin in Spain). Early in his reign he was frightened by a serious illness, from which he nearly died; as a result he was baptized and was thenceforth enthusiastic in his support of Christianity. In 380 he issued a law saying that all Christians should follow the teachings of the bishops of Rome and Alexandria. This was a simple and clear statement in support of the teachings of Nicaea, and it avoided doctrinal sophistication or doubt: faith was defined by reference to the teaching of individual bishops. Theodosios, however, thought it was wise to call an ecumenical council to put an end to the Arian controversy that had divided the empire for more than half a century and had defied all attempts at compromise. Thus, the first Council of Constantinople was held in May of 381. The council added slightly to the Creed of the Council of Nicaea, but it reaffirmed the teachings of that council and essentially put an end to debate about Arianism in the East. Some individuals, of course, continued to maintain Arian teachings, but the theological controversy finally seemed settled with the resolute decision of both emperor and council. In the meantime, however, the bishop Ulfilas had already been active in converting the Goths to Arian Christianity. Thus, ironically enough, Arianism was to remain a potent force in the West, not among the Roman Christians, but among the barbarians, and it remained a major difference and source of conflict between Romans and barbarians. This was especially important because the bishop of Rome (the pope) grew in importance and the orthodox bishops in the West came to acquire political as well as religious power. The bishops, of course, regarded the Germans first and foremost as heretics.

Theodosios' policy toward paganism was likewise remarkably straightforward and pragmatic. He seems personally to have accepted Christianity wholeheartedly, and he could not really understand why some would persist in following "false" teachings. As a result, just as he had viewed the Arian controversy in practical terms, he looked at paganism as a backward practice, out of keeping with the policies of his times, although he was certainly willing to tolerate the paganism of most of his Germanic allies and he maintained good relations with pagan officials such as Symmachus. Thus, like the Christian emperors prior to him, Theodosios supported Christianity and opposed paganism by preferring Christians for posts in the government and providing financial support to churches, monasteries, and other ecclesiastical establishments, which encouraged the continued growth of Christianity within the empire.

Theodosios did, however, take action against pagan cults and the remaining

pagan temples. These official attacks on paganism are chronicled in the laws preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus*, compiled by the emperor's grandson in 438. These show that there was no such thing as a single "edict of Theodosios" that closed the pagan temples. The situation was far more complicated, and local conditions probably played a greater role than anything else. Laws of 383 and 385 prohibited public sacrifice, but paganism (as a belief system) was not forbidden, and the state had no interest or ability to intervene in what people did in private. Thus there was no single order to close all the temples, but there is no doubt that when bishops, cities, and individual Christians made requests to close individual places of pagan worship, these were often favorably received by state officials. Many temples were undoubtedly destroyed, with or without official approval. In part because the temples officially belonged to the state, imperial officials were generally supposed to protect them, but temples were frequently attacked by bishops, and even by groups of monks, and administrators commonly looked the other way. Sometimes the local population resisted these actions and tried to prevent the destruction of their temples, and violence often occurred.

One of the most dramatic and symbolic of these events was the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria. This temple to the god Serapis was one of the most famous buildings of the ancient world. In 391 Theophilos, the bishop of Alexandria, obtained permission from the emperor to convert the temples of the city into churches. The bishop found an obscene sculpture among the sacred objects in the temple of Dionysos and paraded this through the streets in order to make fun of the pagans for their supposed immorality. The pagans were incensed by this and a riot broke out between the pagans and the Christians. Olympios, a pagan philosopher, gathered together a group of pagans, seized the Serapeum, and turned it into a fortress. The pagans rushed out of the Serapeum and beat up Christians, some of whom they brought back to the

Box 4.3 Destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria

The temple of the Egyptian god Serapis in Alexandria was one of the most famous centers of polytheism (paganism) in the ancient world. The Serapeum (or Serapion) remained open for worship well after the time of Constantine, but it was finally turned into a Christian church in 391, during the reign of Theodosios I. This event was regarded by pagans as a particularly serious defeat, an indication that an era had passed. Theophilos (Theophilus), the fiery bishop of Alexandria, set about to silence any opposition to Christianity in the Egyptian capital, but his

attack on the pagan shrines quickly turned into a violent clash between Christians and pagans, and imperial officials were unable to control the situation. The destruction of the Serapeum was described by many contemporaries, including the church historian Sozomen, whose account is printed below. From this one should notice how the pagans responded to the insult shown to their religion and the violence of the events that followed. Also notable is how the emperor finally managed to put an end to the uprising.

About this period, the bishop of Alexandria [Theophilus], to whom the temple of Dionysus had, at his own request, been granted by the emperor, converted the edifice into a church. The statues were removed, the *adyta* [the secret places in temples where objects used in worship were kept] were exposed; and, in order to cast disrepute on the pagan mysteries, he made a procession for the display of these objects, the *phalli*, and he made a public exhibition of whatever other objects had been concealed in the *adyta* which really were, or seemed to be, ridiculous. The pagans, amazed at so unexpected an exposure, could not suffer it in silence, but conspired together to attack the Christians.

They killed many of the Christians, wounded others, and seized the Serapion, a temple which was conspicuous for beauty and vastness and which was seated on an eminence. This they converted into a temporary citadel; and hither they conveyed many of the Christians, put them to the torture, and compelled them to offer sacrifice. Those who refused compliance were crucified, had both legs broken, or were put to death in some cruel manner. When the sedition had prevailed for some time, the rulers came and urged the people to remember the laws, to lay down their arms, and to give up the Serapion. There came then Romanus, the general of the military legions in Egypt, and Evagrius, the prefect of Alexandria. As their efforts, however, to reduce the people to submission were utterly in vain, they made known what had transpired to the emperor. Those who had shut themselves up in the Serapion prepared a more spirited resistance, from fear of the punishment that they knew would await their audacious proceedings, and they were further instigated to revolt by the inflammatory discourses of a man named Olympius, attired in the garments of a philosopher, who told them that they ought to die rather than neglect the gods of their fathers. Perceiving that they were greatly dispirited by the destruction of the idolatrous statues, he assured them that such a circumstance did not warrant their renouncing their religion; for that the statues were composed of corruptible materials, and were mere pictures, and therefore would disappear; whereas, the powers which had dwelt within them, had flown to heaven. By such representations as these, he retained the multitude with him in the Serapion.

When the emperor was informed of these occurrences, he declared that the Christians who had been slain were blessed, inasmuch as they had been admitted to the honor of martyrdom, and had suffered in defense of the faith. He offered free pardon to those who had slain them, hoping that by this act of clemency they would be the more readily induced to embrace Christianity; and he commanded the demolition of the temples in Alexandria which had been the cause of the popular sedition. It is said that, when this imperial edict was read in public, the Christians uttered loud shouts of joy, because the emperor laid the odium of what had occurred upon the pagans. The people who were guarding the Serapion were so terrified at hearing these shouts, that they took to flight, and the Christians immediately obtained possession of the spot, which they have retained ever since. I have been informed that, on the night preceding this occurrence, Olympius heard the voice of one singing hallelujah in the Serapion. The doors were shut and everything was still; and as he could see no one, but could only hear the voice of the singer, he at once understood what the sign signified; and unknown to any one he quitted the Serapion and embarked for Italy. It is said that when the temple was being demolished, some stones were found, on which were hieroglyphic characters in the form of a cross, which on being submitted to the inspection of the learned, were interpreted as signifying the life to come. These characters led to the conversion of several of the pagans, as did likewise other inscriptions found in the same place, and which contained predictions

of the destruction of the temple. It was thus that the Serapion was taken, and, a little while after, converted into a church; it received the name of the Emperor Arcadius. (Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.17, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, translated under the editorial supervision of Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 2 (New York, 1890, repr. Grand Rapids, MI, 1979–86))

temple, where they crucified them. The augustal prefect, the chief military official in Egypt, was unable to restore order, and he sought reinforcement from imperial troops. These were dispatched from Constantinople and the revolt collapsed. The Serapeum was then converted into a church. In 391 and 392 Theodosios forbade all pagan cults, in public and private, although again the law certainly could not be strictly enforced.

In the West Gratian at first granted toleration to the pagans, but he changed his mind, probably under the influence of Ambrose, the bishop of Milan. Gratian was the last emperor to hold the title *pontifex maximus* (chief priest of the pagan cult), an honor he resigned in 381 when he removed the Altar of Victory from the Senate in Rome. (Pope Gregory I (r. 590–604) was the first to use this same title as the “chief priest” of Christendom.)

Gratian, however, did not inspire the loyalty of the troops. He was well educated and intelligent, but there was considerable opposition to him. Valentinian had not ruled long enough to establish loyalty to his dynasty, and in 383 a revolt broke out, led by the Spanish officer Magnus Maximus. Gratian was killed on August 25, 383. Valentinian II, then 13 years old, was still emperor, but he was unable to exercise any independent power. Theodosios at first recognized Maximus, but in 387 Maximus invaded Italy, which belonged to Valentinian II, and Theodosios decided to take action. The senior emperor marched west and in 388 he defeated and killed the usurper. The emperor acted as the protector of Valentinian II and took the young emperor’s sister, Galla, as his second wife, but Theodosios was from this time at least the undisputed ruler of the entire Roman world.

Theodosios remained in Italy from 388 to 391, leaving the East in the hands of his son Arkadios, who had been *augustus* since 383. In 391 the emperor returned to Constantinople. He left Valentinian II in the care of Arbogast, the Frankish *magister militum*, who had helped Theodosios defeat Maximus. In 392 Valentinian attempted to assert his independence from Arbogast, but he was soon found hanged, and Arbogast quickly proclaimed Eugenius as emperor. On the one hand, Arbogast’s action showed how political power in the West had fallen into the hands of Germans. On the other, regardless of how much power a

German commander might have, it was unthinkable for a barbarian to claim the imperial title for himself. This is an interesting phenomenon in its own right, and it was one of the clear differences between Romans and barbarians (the other being the difference in religion, with the barbarians being Arians and the Romans orthodox).

Eugenius was a professor of rhetoric and a half-hearted Christian, but he found support among the pagans who were opposed to Theodosios' policy of Christianization; the pagans hoped that Eugenius might be a new Julian, who would favor paganism once again. In 394 Theodosios marched west once more and faced Arbogast and Eugenius at the River Frigidus in northern Italy (September 6, 394). Theodosios was victorious and Arbogast and Eugenius were killed. This was the last opportunity for toleration of paganism or a propagan policy in the empire.

In 384 the final chapter was written in the controversy over the Altar of Victory in the Senate in Rome. This altar had come to be a symbol of tradition for the old senatorial aristocracy in Rome, which regarded the altar as a cultural symbol as much as a focus for religious celebration. The altar had been removed, probably by Constantine, and then replaced in the Senate by Julian. Gratian, as we have said, then had it removed once again. Symmachus, the prefect of the city and one of the leading representatives of old-fashioned aristocratic culture, petitioned the young emperor Valentinian II to have the altar replaced in the Senate. Symmachus pointed out that the altar was a traditional symbol of Roman culture and he appealed for toleration, since there were "many ways to reach God." This request was countered in an equally famous response by Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, who argued – simply – that the pagans were wrong in their adherence to false gods and that there was only one way to reach God. Despite Symmachus' plea for toleration – which sounds so reasonable to the modern reader – the altar was never returned to the Senate House.

In 390 one of Theodosios' generals, the Goth Buteric, was murdered in Thessaloniki by a crowd who disliked the position that the Germans held in the army. Theodosios responded in typical fashion by feigning mildness and inviting the populace of Thessaloniki to assemble in the hippodrome to celebrate the games. At a given moment Theodosios had his troops set upon the unsuspecting people, and thousands of them were massacred. Ambrose of Milan later intervened and refused to allow Theodosios into the church or to communicate with him. In the end Theodosios was forced to admit his crime and do penance – a notable example of how a stubborn church leader could take the moral high

ground and force a powerful emperor to bend to his will. This demonstrated clearly that there were certain things which an emperor – even an orthodox ruler “protected by God” – could not do. It should be noted, however, that this event did not weaken Theodosios’ political or military power in any way whatsoever.

Theodosios, like Valentinian I, and – more importantly – Constantine before him, sought consciously to pass power on within his own family, in other words to establish a dynasty. This partly explains the importance of the women in his family, especially his first wife Aelia Flaccilla, although other forces were certainly at play here, including, arguably, a greater role accorded to women generally in the society of the time. Theodosios married Flaccilla, ca. 376, and she bore him three children, including the future emperors Arkadios and Honorius, before her premature death in 385 or 386. She was one of the first Byzantine empresses to be depicted widely on coinage: despite her relatively brief time on the throne, coins were struck in her name at a number of mints and her portrait is clearly meant to provide a recognizable image of the empress. Furthermore, her piety and charity clearly made a mark on the leading Christian spokesmen of the day. The church historian Sozomen credits her with persuading her husband not to meet with the Arian Eunomios in an effort to find some compromise on the Arian question, while Theodoret praises her charity and kindness to the poor and her personal involvement in the care of the crippled. St. Gregory of Nyssa bestowed special praise on her piety and good works, and it is a mark of her standing that the great orator and theologian personally delivered a eulogy at the time of her death. Again, we may suspect some manipulation of Aelia Flaccilla’s image by the circle closest to the emperor, but there seems little reason to doubt that the empress impressed contemporaries with the power of her own personality, and she is still revered as a saint by the Orthodox church (her feast day is September 14).

Theodosios was only 48 years old, but he died early in 395 in Milan. He left the East to his son Arkadios (who was 17 or 18) and the West to his son Honorius (who was only 10); both were the sons of Aelia Flaccilla. As mentioned above, Theodosios had married again, this time Galla, the sister of Valentinian II (and thus the daughter of Gratian), which connected his family directly with that of his predecessors; with her Theodosios had a daughter, Galla Placidia, who was to have a long and eventful life in the West: wife of Constantius III, mother of Valentinian III, and grandmother of Placidia, who was the wife of Olybrius, emperor in 472.

The Fourth Century as an Age of Change

Although there was little that could be called truly revolutionary in the time from the death of Constantine (337) until the death of Theodosios I (395), the period witnessed significant and long-term change. This change was not sudden but gradual, and to a certain degree it can be seen as the implementation and amplification of the movements and processes that had been set in motion during the reign of Constantine. Thus, in this 60-year period the empire tilted across the religious line, from one dominated by paganism and pagan thought to one where Christianity, Christian institutions, and Christian sentiment had become dominant.

This change was not simply the replacement of one group of gods with another, but a much more radical change in which polytheism – which was by nature generally tolerant of diverse religious traditions and approaches to religious “truth” – was replaced by a monotheist tradition which claimed that it held the only approach to truth and which therefore viewed all divergence as necessarily false and deserving of suppression. One might argue that such a monotheist tradition had always existed, but now it was inseparably bound to the power of the Roman state, which was committed to the maintenance of what was perceived as Christian truth and order. Eusebios of Caesarea may have been the first to understand the full significance of this alliance of the Christian church with the power of the Roman state, but at the time of Constantine this relationship was uncertain and its ramifications anything but clear. During the course of the fourth century, however, as new generations came into power, confident in their own view of the world and certain of the relationship between divine truth and political power, this relationship developed and became normative. The policies of Theodosios the Great were not essentially different from those of Constantine, but they were based on a half-century of imperial certainty in Christian truth and a realization that the agreement made between Constantine and the Christian church had become the basis of Roman power and the Roman way of life: it is significant that, for Romans and barbarians alike, orthodox Christians and *romanitas* (Romanness) had become identical. The dispute between Symmachus and Ambrose over the Altar of Victory in Rome is often seen as a significant moment in this development, a crisis in which the issue was put into sharp relief.

The fourth century was also one in which the power of the bishops clearly came to dominate the Christian church, and the hierarchy that was normative in

later centuries came to the fore. At the time of Constantine, or even Constantius II, this was not a foregone conclusion, but by the middle of the century the bishops had come to represent the church without any opposition from within. This can be seen clearly in the series of councils, culminating in the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), but also in the many local councils that were held to deal with doctrinal and – even more commonly – administrative issues. The bishops, not surprisingly, came primarily from the curial class, the local aristocracies of the cities of the empire, since the *curiales* were the ones who had the training and the experience that prepared them for the responsibilities of office within the church. Imperial legislation attempted to restrain this drain of the *curiales* into the ranks of the clergy, but this was to no effect, both because it was impossible to control the religious sensibilities of the age and also because individuals from this group naturally sought positions of power and influence in society as a whole.

The fourth century also witnessed the development and institutionalization of Christian monasticism. The desire for the ascetic life, of course, is common to most religious traditions, and Christian monasticism had its roots in Jewish asceticism, especially as it was practiced in the period from the Maccabees onward. Thus, there is evidence of Christian ascetics from an early age, individuals who sought to follow the example of John the Baptist – and Christ himself – and who had spent time in the solitude and wildness of desert places, seeking direct communion with God as a result of their self-denial. By the third century there were large numbers of ascetics, especially in the deserts of Egypt, devoting their lives to the solitary worship of God and the attempt to reach direct communion with him.

The best-known of the early ascetics is St. Anthony (or St. Antonios, ca. 251–356), an Egyptian born to a prosperous family who gave away all his wealth to follow the monastic life. St. Athanasios' biography of St. Anthony (written ca. 356–7) provides characteristic details about the ascetic life: Anthony's struggles with demons and miracles became the standard fare of all subsequent ascetic lives. Although Anthony attracted a number of followers, all of them lived a strictly eremitic (solitary) life, with each monk living on his own, though they did occasionally come together for worship, group teaching, and admonition.

Pachomios (ca. 290–346, and thus a contemporary of St. Anthony) is generally regarded as one of the main influences in the development of cenobitic (communal) monasticism. He was an Egyptian born of pagan parents, who encountered Christians while serving in the Roman army, converted to

Christianity, and then entered the ascetic life ca. AD 315. Perhaps because of his experience with the organization of the Roman army, Pachomios sought to provide more structure to the monastic life, and he organized his many followers into various communal monasteries, nine for men and two for women.

Monasticism spread outside of Egypt to Syria and Asia Minor in both its eremitic and its cenobitic forms. It reached Constantinople in the mid fourth century and a number of monasteries with special urban characteristics were established in the city. One of the strongest supporters of cenobitic monasticism was Basil of Caesarea (discussed previously as one of the Cappadocian Fathers). Early in his life Basil traveled to the monastic centers in Egypt and Syria but eventually established himself back in Asia Minor. As a bishop he encouraged monks to devote themselves to an active role in society, and he saw the monastery as a community whose members ought to work together for common goals. He wrote a series of regulations for monasteries that emphasized these concepts, and these had a considerable impact on the development of monasticism, both within Byzantium and beyond its borders.

The role of women in the society of the fourth century has often been discussed, with widely different conclusions. On the one hand, we have already seen that imperial women, such as Helena, the mother of Constantine I, and Aelia Flaccilla, the first wife of Theodosios I, wielded considerable power and influence and this phenomenon continued, and expanded, in the following centuries. What about “ordinary” women? Presumably the greatest change is likely to have come from the growing influence of Christianity, but this influence can be read in two different ways.

On the one hand, Christianity certainly recognized women as human beings in their own right and the spiritual equals of men. It called for the protection of women (and children), especially virgins and widows, and even set up institutions such as orphanages (*orphanotrophea*), monasteries for women (called “nunneries” in the West, but usually referred to simply as “monasteries” or “female monasteries” in Byzantium), and old-age homes (*gerokomeia*). The emergence of the cult of the Virgin Mary probably reflected the piety of women and the acknowledgment of a female element in Christianity. Laws in the fourth century restricted the Roman right of divorce, which has often been seen as a protection of the position of women, since men could not simply divorce their wives without reason.

On the other hand, from the beginning Christianity had an essentially negative attitude toward women, who were (in the person of Eve) regarded as the source

of sin in the world and (in the person of every woman) seen as temptation to sin for every man. From the Apostle Paul onward the Church Fathers expressed sentiments that are patently misogynistic, and the monastic movement can be seen as designed in part to “free” men from the temptations of women.

Nonetheless, many modern historians have seen the ascetic traditions of the period as liberating women from the burdens of childbirth and homemaking. In addition, female asceticism did provide some women with an opportunity for administrative experience and not infrequently the exercise of real economic power. Further, by the denial of sexuality and the power of the body, the ascetic movement can be seen as providing women with a new kind of authority over their own bodies that had not generally been granted them in previous societies.

We should keep this complex situation in mind as we consider the history of women in the Byzantine centuries. The historical sources were mostly written by men and their subjects normally are men, but there were some distinguished Byzantine women authors, some texts and documents speak of women, and we will do our best in the pages that follow to illuminate the position of women in Byzantine society.

Social and Economic Conditions

Socially and economically the fourth century witnessed considerable recovery from the disturbed conditions of the previous 100 years. The general stability of the political situation was certainly an important factor here, and the advantages of the Constantinian economic reforms had an opportunity to work. It is true that, although the gold coinage remained firm from the time of the introduction of the *solidus*, the copper coinage – which was used normally by most ordinary people – apparently weakened significantly, which probably resulted in considerable increases in prices. Famines and other shortages were certainly known in the major cities, although it is not certain to what degree these were due to economic policies and to what extent they were simply the result of situations – like drought and disease – that were beyond the control of the state.

Certainly the political and economic policies of the time weighed heavily on the *curiales*, the class of local aristocrats in the cities of the empire. As we have seen, Constantine had confiscated the state land on which the finances of local government were based, and cities had to fall back on the generosity of their wealthy citizens. Not surprisingly, after the difficulties of the third century, many

of these families had limited resources, and were not always able to bear the burdens of these expectations. Furthermore, the central government made the *curiales* of each city personally responsible for the payment of the land tax, so these individuals found themselves caught between the financial demands of the central government on the one side, and the needs of the local city on the other. Spokespersons such as Libanios saw the *curiales* as the heart of ancient Roman civilization, and decried their demise; the emperor Julian supported this view and sought to restore the vitality of this group. Some *curiales* sought to evade their responsibilities, either by elevation to the level of the imperial aristocracy (the senatorial class), by enrollment in the ranks of the Christian clergy, or even (occasionally) by flight into desert places. Imperial legislation tried to prevent such action, although this can hardly have been an effective check.

Similar legislation was also levied in an attempt to guarantee collection of the tax income owed to the state and to insure that the food supplies delivered to the cities were sufficient to prevent riots that might disturb the stability of the imperial government. Thus, legislation was established that, to a certain degree, froze individuals in their place and occupation. This included the semi-free peasants, called *coloni*, who were required to remain on the land they were farming: the idea being that their labor was essential to the ability of the landowner to pay the taxes he owed to the state. In addition, members of some of the most important *collegia* (occupational “guilds”), such as bakers, shipowners, pork-producers, and vintners, were supposed to remain in their occupations and their children were to do the same, and many of them were required to provide goods and/or services to the state at a fixed rate, even if that meant the delivery of goods at a loss. The idea behind this was that these individuals provided things that were essential for the peaceful functioning of society, and the state felt it necessary to force their compliance with requests for goods and services. Restrictions on the freedom of the *curiales*, mentioned above, should be seen in the same light. Naturally, these were regulations that could be enforced only with difficulty, and the repetition of rules such as these in the contemporary codes is testimony that they were probably honored more in the breach than in fact. Nonetheless, such regulations must have at least produced an atmosphere of constraint, and they have led many modern scholars to view the age as one of oppression and state control. It is in fact more likely that the regulations are evidence of a society in flux, characterized by rapid and sometimes radical change. The state, especially in the West where it was clearly weaker, sought to constrain these changes, and the result was the legislation under consideration.

In the East, however, there is little evidence that such restrictive laws were needed and, even if they were formally on the books they can hardly have been enforced. The written sources make it clear that there was considerable movement of people, including traders and government officials (who could make use of the empire's efficient system of communication), but also churchmen and – perhaps most striking of all – wandering teachers and poets and the monks who frequently brought their views from the deserts into the centers of contemporary cities. The fact that the state occasionally sought to limit such movement is merely evidence that it frequently occurred.

FURTHER READING

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- John Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*. London, 1989.
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PRIMARY SOURCES IN TRANSLATION

Most of the sources listed for chapter 3 continue to be important for this period. In addition, many works of the fourth-century Church Fathers, such as Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Ambrose of Milan provide important insights into social as well as religious phenomena of the time. See also the following.

Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* (Histories), written in Latin by a pagan who wished to continue the history of Rome from the place where Tacitus left off (AD 96) to his own time. The early part of this work is lost, and only that for the years 353–78 survives. This text focuses on military and political events and provides interesting pictures of the emperors and many of the important figures of the day. His views on the Christian clergy are also worth noting. Even though he was a supporter of the emperor Julian, he provides a reasonably balanced picture of that important ruler. J. C. Rolfe, trans., *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 3 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA, 1935–9.

Julian (emperor 361–3) was a scholar and a voluminous writer. Many of his works survive, including a semi-humorous history of the emperors before his time, many orations, letters, and a polemical work against the Christians. A good introduction to his work is J. C. Wright, trans., *Works*, 3 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA, 1949–54.

Libanius (Libanios), an orator from Antioch and leading spokesman for pagan culture and the rights and honors of the city aristocrats of the fourth century. Many of his orations and letters survive. A. F. Norman, trans., *Libanius: Selected Works*, 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA, 1969–77; A. F. Norman, ed. and trans., *Libanius: Autobiography and Selected Letters*, 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA, 1993; A. F. Norman, trans., *Antioch as a Centre of Hellenic Culture as Observed by Libanius*. Liverpool, 2000; S. Bradbury, *Selected Letters of Libanius*. Liverpool, 2004.

Philostorgius (Philostorgios), *Ecclesiastical History*, important in part because the author was not orthodox, but tended toward Arianism, and his work therefore provides a rare opportunity to get a somewhat different view of the events of the fourth century. The text of his church history does not survive, but in the ninth century the patriarch Photios wrote an epitome (abridgement) of it and this work still exists. P. R. Amidon, trans., *Philostorgius: Church History*. Atlanta, GA, 2007.

Themistius (Themistios), philosopher and statesman, was born in Asia Minor but

taught for most of his life in Constantinople. R. J. Penella, trans., *The Private Orations of Themistius*. Berkeley, 2000.